

A Plea
FOR THE
SABBATH-SCHOOL SYSTEM,

DELIVERED FEB. 2, 1830, AT THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

Gettysburg Sunday-School,

BY

S. S. SCHMUCKER,

Professor of Christian Theology in the Theological Seminary
at Gettysburg.

Published by the theological Students and other teachers of said school.

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ANALYTICAL-SCHOOL SYSTEM

DELIVERED FEB. 2, 1850, AT THE ANTI-SLAVERY

ON THE

ANALYTICAL-SCHOOL SYSTEM

BY

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at Cambridge

Published by the Anti-Slavery Committee and other friends of said school

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PREFACE.

THE following discourse was delivered before the students of the Theological Seminary, and other teachers and friends of the Sunday-School of Gettysburg, as well as delegates from the different schools in the neighbouring country ; who attended for the purpose of forming a County Union, auxiliary to the American Sunday-School Union. Soon after its delivery, a committee of teachers waited on the author, requesting the manuscript for publication. As two thirds of the sermon had been delivered extemporaneously, and the author had no desire to appear before the public, he declined acceding to the request. Several weeks afterwards, the same committee repeated their application, stating that a desire to see the sermon printed, and a belief that it would be useful, extensively prevailed. Under these circumstances, the author felt it his duty to write out his recollections of what he delivered, and commit them to the disposal of those, at whose request he, on this occasion, undertook to advocate the noble cause of sabbath-schools.

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PLEA
FOR THE
SABBATH-SCHOOL SYSTEM.

PROV. XIV, 34. *“Righteousness exalteth a nation.”*

WHEN we cast our eyes over the history of the church, and contemplate her rise, progress and various fluctuations, we find, that, though there never was a time, in which the gates of hell prevailed against her, yet had she her seasons of adversity as well as of prosperity. At one time, we see the sword of persecution suspended over her by the hand of Pagan emperors, and the sacramental host of martyrs slaughtered by hundreds and thousands amidst circumstances of the most repulsive cruelty, or, chained to the stake, mingle their expiring breath with the devouring flame. At another, we see her reclining in the arms of imperial favour, and secularized by unhallowed union with civil power, and degenerating from century to century into a mere political engine : her simple doctrines being transformed into scholastic jargon, her holy precepts relaxed into a filthy system of mercenary righteousness, until all her glories are shrouded in Egyptian night. But He who commanded light to shine out of darkness, bade one constellation after another, arise amid the gloom that brooded over her ;

until, at length, he blessed the world with the mid-day splendour of the glorious Reformation. Thus, if weeping was the portion of his church for the night, it was succeeded by the joy of the morning.

In such a day of joy in Zion, has our happy lot been cast. Forty years ago, the enemies of Christianity believed they had almost entirely swept our holy religion from the earth. They boastingly predicted, that, in half a century, not a bible would be found, save here and there a neglected copy, covered with dust, as a memorial of the superstition of former ages. But ah ! could the wretched Voltaire, and Volney, and Paine, now look out from their dark den of perdition—how changed is the scene ! The beastly debauchery and coldblooded murder, with which their principles deluged Europe, struck a panic into the public mind, produced a general reaction, and convinced both rulers and people, that, be Christianity true or false, the nation, which tramples under foot its sacred precepts, is accursed. The church has awaked from her dream of infidelity, and has, in many places, shaken herself from the corruptions of former ages. The chosen few, who, through the struggle never bowed the knee to Baal, aided by others since entered on the stage, have tasked their powers to the utmost, and spread the book of God, and the religion of heaven, over a large portion of our earth. Christians in general, beginning to feel, that upon them too devolves the duty of sending the gospel to every creature, have formed themselves into various voluntary associations, to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. And, if there are any features in the religious character of the present

age, on which the angels of heaven, and the God of heaven, look down with peculiar delight ; the present unprecedented effort to diffuse intelligence and religious principles over the whole rising generation, the gigantic, noble enterprize of sabbath-school instruction is certainly one. How deeply you, my hearers, sympathize in this general feeling, and how willingly you co-operate in the great work, is attested by your presence here this day.

Called on to address you on this important theme, I have selected, as the basis of my discourse, the words of Solomon : "*Righteousness exalteth a nation.*"

Whilst the effect of sabbath-schools unavoidably must be, to diffuse general intelligence among the future citizens of our youthful republic, the most important and principal object aimed at confessedly is, to instruct them on the momentous subject of their everlasting interests, to instil into their minds the principles of the religion of Jesus, and thus lead them to that righteousness or godliness, which is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. That righteousness does exalt a nation, we take for granted upon the authority of the inspired writer. Hence, if sabbath-schools tend to promote righteousness, they must tend to exalt the nation. Both propositions stand more in need of illustration than formal proof. In discussing them, we shall call your attention to the following inquiries :

WHAT IS HERE MEANT BY RIGHTEOUSNESS ?

HOW DO SUNDAY-SCHOOLS TEND TO EXALT A NATION ?

Passing over the interpretation of those, who render the original "*almsgiving exalteth a nation,*" we remark, that by

righteousness in reference to man, is, in Scripture, generally meant, virtuous conduct proceeding from proper motives. As different degrees of light were enjoyed by men, under the different economies of the covenant of grace, it follows, that, although righteousness is substantially the same in all men, whether living under the Adamic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, or the Christian dispensation ; yet must its standard be gradually elevated, as new accessions of light are given. Accordingly, righteousness under the gospel dispensation, signifies sincere obedience to the law of God, in all its spirituality, as developed in the books of the New Covenant, or as we now term it, *true piety*. Nor is sincerity its only attribute ; it must be universal, the effort of obedience must extend to all the requisitions of the entire law, whether they relate to public or private life, whether they define our duties to our God, or to ourselves, or to our fellowmen. In proportion, then, as civil rulers are righteous, they will conform to the inspired command: "Judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgement, ye shall hear the small as well as the great ; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgement is God's." The law, which they enact, will be just and impartial in their provisions, and be executed without respect to persons. A righteous ruler will neither favour the rich, nor grind the faces of the poor. A righteous administration will suppress vice, as the grand source of national evil, and promote integrity and virtue, as the basis of civil liberty and prosperity.

The motives to this obedience are embodied in the sacred volume. They are not to be sought in those subjec-

tive diversities of sectarian opinion, to which human nature has ever been prone to attach too much importance. These exert no perceptible influence on the life and practice of men. Who, at the present day, would assert, that persons of equally distinguished piety and zeal, may not be found in either of the orthodox denominations, or that our being distinctively a nation of Lutherans, or Presbyterians, or Congregationalists, or Episcopalians, will exalt us in the eyes of our heavenly Father? But the grand fountain of motive, whence true righteousness flows, must be sought in those truths, which constitute the prominent features of the moral government of God; such as the nature and character of the lawgiver; the extent, spirituality and obligations of his law; the rewards and punishments annexed to it; the character of the subject and his inability to fulfil its requisitions; and especially the gracious aid that is offered him, by the glorious scheme of redemption through the divine Redeemer Jesus Christ. These are the prominent doctrines, which, from the very structure of our intellectual and moral nature, are best calculated to fill us with humble devotion, and prompt us to holy activity. It is the love of these truths, which is teaching the different denominations of Christians in our land, to regard each other as brethren, which is filling our nation with the most formidable host of voluntary associations, which Satan has ever beheld arrayed against his kingdom. If any man deny these fundamental aspects of divine truth, he saps the foundations of all righteousness. The maxim of the celebrated Christian Father, Augustine, that "no man can lead a pious life, whose faith is erroneous," is correct when confined to the prominent features of revealed

truth. As virtue is voluntary obedience to truth, it cannot be obedience to error; and the general character of a man's opinions, must have some influence on his conduct. If the man who believes that there is no God, or that he does not punish the transgressions of the wicked, is an honest man and a good citizen; he certainly has less reason for being so, than his Christian neighbour.

Now, to instil these truths into the rising generation, is the grand object of sunday-schools. The bible is generally used as a text-book by all who are able to read it, and the human productions associated with it, are peculiarly such, as are calculated to exemplify, illustrate & enforce these truths. That these schools are the most efficient engine, ever set in motion for this purpose, is demonstrated by experience, and is conceded even by the trepidation of the enemy at their extension. If, then, we receive as true the declaration of the text, that righteousness does exalt a nation, and if it be certain that sabbath-schools do tend to promote righteousness; the conclusion inevitably follows, that sabbath-schools tend to exalt a nation. There can be no escape from this inference. Nor is it even pretended, that sabbath-schools are so mismanaged, as not to produce their proper effect. The enemies do not come with proposals for the improvement of the system; it is against the whole moral machinery that their battery is directed, and for the express reason, that its influence is so powerful! The fact being thus clearly established, it merely remains for us to particularize the mode of its operation, whilst we inquire secondly

HOW DO SABBATH-SCHOOL TEND TO EXALT A NATION?

We are not here called on to discuss the manner, in

which divine truth affects the mind ; and merely make the passing remark , that no reason can be assigned, why moral truth should not have the same kind of intrinsic tendency to produce conviction, which belongs to mathematical, analogical, or any other species of truth. Nor does our design embrace the nature of that additional divine influence, which must accompany it, to render it effectual. The reality of this influence being clearly taught in Scripture, we shall be profited more by prayers for its bestowment, than by disputes about its nature. It is to the effects of sabbath-schools, as exerted on *individuals* and on *the community at large*, that we wish to call your attention.

As the duty of bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is so clearly taught in Scripture, and so obvious from the nature of the case, it is reasonable to expect, that it would receive much attention in the history of the church. That which comes nearest to the modern system of sabbath-schools, is the noble institution of catechetical instruction, which has, with some exceptions, been practised more or less faithfully, in all ages of the church ; and in the hands of pious ministers and catechists, has always proved a blessed institution. As the Christian church degenerated, this institution also became corrupt. Under Charlemagne, a canon was made, directing all ministers to attend to catechisation, and to explain the doctrines of the creed in the vernacular tongue, that is, in the corrupt Latin then prevalent. Yet it soon sunk amid the night of the dark ages, and only by the Reformation was restored to its proper use. Since that time, instruction on this subject has been given to the theological student, as a regular branch of Pastoral Theo-

logy, and many treatises on it are extant, from which some excellent precepts might be transferred to the manual of the sabbath-school teacher. In the earlier ages, catechumens were sometimes divided into the proselytes, whether Jewish or Pagan, who embraced Christianity, and those who were the children of Christian parents. This latter class of pupils was often, at least in part, the same with those of our sabbath-schools.

Nor did Christian parents neglect the private instruction of their offspring. History exhibits many instances, in which the most distinguished luminaries of the church, recorded, in terms of glowing gratitude, the parental care expended in their early religious instruction. It may suffice to specify an Origen, an Augustine, a Cyril, and a Clement of Alexandria.

And how many instances can, even at this early day, be adduced, of persons who have borne testimony to the blessed influence of sabbath-schools on their character in time, and their probable destiny in eternity? The religious education of our offspring is an all-important, arduous work; and those who labour to perform it faithfully, are most willing to accept all the aid afforded by sabbath-schools. But how many parents, insensible of its importance, neglect this sacred duty? How many others, from want of time, or of capacity, perform it very imperfectly! And shall the young immortals therefore grow up in ignorance and vice, fit candidates for everlasting burnings? Oh no! the heart of every christian, of every philanthropist will respond—let them be brought under the influence of sabbath-schools. By this noble institution, the attention of parents themselves, is loudly called to

the importance of a religious education ; they are prompted to rear with more sacred care, and watch with more tender solicitude the young immortals committed to their charge. Nor is this all. It furnishes them with the most desirable and efficient auxiliaries for the work. In our own land above 60,000 individuals have been enlisted in this glorious cause, and are co-operating with parents in training up the rising generation for usefulness on earth, and an eternity of glory beyond the grave! As volunteer legions, who, in the hour of danger, pour forth from their homes, and their families, to fight their country's battles, are animated by a better spirit and more ardent zeal, than those whom necessity pressed into the ranks ; so our sabbath-school teachers are generally the very persons in every town and village, who feel most sensibly the importance of religious instruction, and will labour most zealously to disseminate it. And what arithmetic can calculate the rich harvest of eternal blessings, which is daily growing up from seed thus sown in youthful minds? Upon the aged, the most faithful instruction is often thrown away, but rare indeed are the cases, in which the good impressions made on children, are ever fully erased. How often has not the seed thus sown, speedily germinated, and brought forth the most delightful and abundant fruit? How many young immortals have, in these schools, been made wise unto salvation? With what ardent feeling have they not uttered their gratitude to those, who early taught them to walk in the ways of God ; but in heaven, when treading the golden streets of the celestial city, and basking in the rays wherewith the glory of God & the Lamb do lighten that abode, with what feeling, think you, will the sabbath-scholar and his teacher meet!

But not only *children* are numbered among the pupils of sabbath-schools. The bible being generally used by all who are capable of reading it, pupils of riper years, find in that sacred volume, abundant materials for study: and, by the various helps already published for bible classes, such recitations of more advanced persons, are rendered highly interesting alike to teacher and the taught.

Nor is the influence of sabbath-schools on *parents* unworthy of notice. When irreligious parents see their children preparing for sabbath-school, they are reminded, that the day of the Lord is intended for religious improvement; and may be led to reflect upon the manner, in which they themselves spend its sacred hours. Curiosity leads them to look into the books, brought by the children from the sabbath-school library—they look, they read, their heart is touched, and the books designed for the children, become the messengers of salvation to the parents. Children often request instruction on the subject of their bible lessons. In order to give it, parents themselves must read the chapter,—they read, and many are the cases, in which the words given by inspiration, flash conviction into the mind, and become the power of God unto the salvation of their souls!

The *teachers* also, are not labouring in vain, or spending their strength for nought. As in intellectual science, so in morals, one of the most successful methods of acquiring proficiency, is to teach. The sacred truths are not less efficacious, nor the accompanying divine influence less copious, in the case of the teachers, than of the taught. No other method of spending the Lord's day, could be better calculated to call

home the wandering thoughts, and rivet the attention on divine truth, and impress the soul with the reality and importance of religion, than the occupation of sabbath-school teachers. How many are the cases in which, whilst watering others, they have been watered themselves; in which, teaching others, God has graciously taught them? And can any thing be more congenial to the feelings of him, who has not merely a name to live, but has really passed from death unto life, than to spend a portion of his sabbath hours, in bringing home the lambs to the fold of Christ? Such exercise invigorates the christian's graces, gives scope and energy to his benevolent sympathies, and engraves the traits of his Master's character more deeply on his soul. It was the benevolence of action, which characterized that most glorious and divine teacher, who went about doing good, and that pre-eminent exemplar of human teachers, who bade us labour for the mind which was in Christ Jesus, his master. It is for want of action, that many a christian character exhibits such a morbid, wavering feebleness; and small indeed is the value of that benevolence, which sheds the tear of sympathy over the tale of imaginary sorrow, and gazes listless, and unmoved, upon the realities of human wretchedness. How truly christian, how salutary is the work of the sabbath-school teacher, how bright the glory encircling his path in this life, how great his reward in the kingdom of heaven!

Such, then, being the salutary effects of sabbath-schools on the *Individuals*, more immediately connected with them; is it possible, that they can exert a different influence on the *Community at large*?

Reason would expect, that, as nations are but an aggregate

mass composed of individuals, the elements of national and individual prosperity and decline, must be the same. To this position, history bears unwavering testimony. Nations have their rise and fall, as well as individuals; and the causes which accelerate the one, produce the other. Vice is the grand high-way to national, no less than individual, ruin. Many are the nations, which have travelled this downward road; and why should we expect, that the great King of nations, will arrest the wheels of revolving empire in our behalf, and not regulate our rise or fall by the same laws, which determine the destinies of other nations? On the contrary, no truth is more clearly established by history, than that nations in general are prosperous and happy, in proportion as they are virtuous. What then are the effects of sabbath-schools upon a nation?

They tend to diminish the number of criminals in our land, by closing the avenues, from which our prisons and penitentiaries are filled. Enter one of these abodes of guilt, and converse with its miserable inmates about the important truths of religion. Their ignorance will soon teach you, that neglect of religious education, is the fruitful mother of, by far the greater portion of penal misery, endured in our land. Finding food enough in this degenerate world, these habits grew with their growth and strengthened with their strength, until breaking forth in overt violation of the civil law, they conducted their victims to these abodes of wretchedness. And, as they trod with heedless foot their downward course, no warning voice recalled them, no parental instructions recurred to their memory, no sabbath-school lesson of God's anger at transgressors, filled them with alarm,

or arrested them in their way to ruin ! Sabbath-schools, by removing the cause of this evil, must tend to remedy the effect. The solemn sanctions of religion, impressed on the mind in early years, exert a powerful influence in restraining men from sin. This belief is not mere theory. The experiment has been tried, and actual calculation proves, that comparatively very few of those, who enjoyed this instruction, are ever arraigned at the bar of their country for the transgression of her laws ; and the Recorder of London states, that, among a class of population peculiarly degraded, out of two thousand children taught in sabbath-schools, only fourteen had ever been brought before him for crime.

Again, sabbath-schools tend to prevent the formation of that species of population, called in Europe canaille or rabble, which in all governments, and especially in republics, is the most dangerous. Ignorance, vice and extreme poverty, are the characteristics of these unfortunate beings. They are the natural product of an overgrown population, and an overdone state of business in old countries. Neglected in their education, and void of moral principle, they are an addition merely to the physical strength of the land ; and having nothing to lose by riot or revolution, they are ever ready to wield the club, the axe, or the bayonet for any demagogue or usurper, that will pay them best, or feed them with the brightest promises of a rapine or plunder. These are the materials, which chiefly compose the standing armies of Europe, and which acted a prominent part in the murderous scenes of the French Revolution. Some master-spirits, "set on fire of hell," did indeed ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm ; but it was generally the filthy, tattered, unprincipled

mob, that wielded the murderous bayonet, and dragged its devoted victims to the sanguinary guillotine, in those prolonged and fearful days, when infidel France was deluged in such brutal and murderous bloodshed, & polluted herself by such fiendlike desecration of all the ties of nature and decency, as the sun never before witnessed in his course. Such a population is, thanks be to God ! as yet, almost unknown among us. A few of our prominent cities alone, present any thing resembling it ; and the vast extent of territory, over which our population is sparsely scattered, removes to some distance the danger of its accumulation. Yet our characteristic pursuit of filthy lucre, the neglect of education both literary and religious, in many parts of our country, the vast and increasing influx of foreigners, especially of the poorer and vicious class, forbid the hope that we are in no danger. Now what institution could promise more in counteracting this evil, than sabbath-schools, which bring gratuitous instruction, and religious instruction too, and that drawn from the bible itself, within the reach of every family? No matter how poor or how vicious the parents, the child is admitted to full participation of all the blessings of gospel light; and the book of God, and other holy books, are brought home to parents, perhaps to bless them with eternal life. If every citizen would encourage sabbath-schools, and if necessary, aid in teaching ; our happy land would be saved from the fearful curse of such a population, and the fair temple of our liberties continue to afford our descendants protection and happiness, for centuries after the hands that reared it have mouldered in the grave.

Again, sabbath-schools tend to preserve the purity and stability of our political institutions. Man by the very structure

of his mental nature is a religious being, and must have some religion. Few men have ever been, for any length of time, unwavering atheists. Even the far-famed Voltaire, when he felt his heart-strings breaking, and when he saw the hideous form of death before him, applied for consolation to the minister of that Jesus, whom he had so virulantly persecuted, so blasphemously vilified ! No nation has ever been found, which had not some kind of religion ; and, consequently, no organized government has ever existed without it. Even the skeptical Polybius, the celebrated Greek historian, who flourished about a century before the Christian era, and as the relick of his Universal History proves, had carefully studied the governments of different nations, pronounces the religion of the Romans in the earlier ages of the Republic, the most useful feature of their government, the strongest pillar which sustained their liberties. How much more benign and efficient an influence must the pure, the holy precepts of Christianity exert on the nation sincerely embracing them ? What stronger barrier could be presented against intrigue and corruption, than the dread of a righteous judgement, an endless retribution. What more powerful motive to fidelity amid the storms of political animosity and conflicting interests, than the belief that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do ? Nor is it at all remarkable, that moral principle should be essential to the faithful administration of a good government. What is government, but a civil compact between the rulers and the ruled, by which each party is obligated to certain duties, under the sanction of an oath, expressed or implied ? But what binding power has moral obligation on him, who has no fear of God before his

eyes, no sense of future retribution on his mind? However just the laws, however virtuous the higher rulers may be, if a nation be generally corrupt, what power can ensure the just administration of the government in its minor ramifications? Can a virtuous emperor, or king, or president, or cabinet, exert an omnipresent influence throughout the nation, deterring the unprincipled magistrate from oppressing the poor, the widow and the orphan? especially when public sentiment in the surrounding community is not such as to restrain him? In a republican government, moreover, there are many and strong temptations to a corrupt exercise of the elective franchise in the citizen, to corrupt, self-interested, partial legislation in the representative; which no power in existence can resist, save a vigorous, uncompromising moral feeling pervading the community. In short, moral or religious principle is to the body politic, what constitutional vigour is to the animal frame; it not only diffuses habitual energy through all its members, but tends also to heal the wounds from time to time inflicted on it. What then, could exert a more salutary influence on our civil institutions, than the general introduction of sabbath-schools; which, beginning in the early years of docility, impress the fear of God, the love of moral integrity, of peace, of justice on the future citizens, and legislators and executives of our land? What could more effectually tend to regulate that tendency to inequality in all governments, which the agrarian laws of Judea, of Sparta, and of Greece, failed eventually to restrain, than sabbath-schools; which, by making us a nation of intelligent virtuous politicians and statesmen, would give a moral stability to our institutions, against which the aristocracy of wealth

& family influence would beat in vain? And, at some future day, when the storms of party spirit and local jealousies rage over our political ocean, when wave rises high upon wave and all political cords are rent asunder, what would be a safer ballast for us, than that love for one another which is inculcated on christians, in their earliest years in sabbath-schools?

Sabbath-schools tend to preserve our country from any improper influence of the clergy. That influence which Christian ministers, according to the will of the Saviour, were designed to exert, is justly entitled to the high and noble appellation of co-operation with God himself. Its design is to lead men to holiness and happiness in time and eternity. This influence, from its very nature, is most desirable, and too much of it can never be diffused over a country. By the Saviour's own appointment, it is connected with the progress of his kingdom. As the glorious gospel of the Son of God goes forth in its power, to elevate and bless a ruined world; the "beautiful feet" of those who bear the glad tidings of peace, will be seen clambering over mountain after mountain, and traversing nation after nation, until Satan shall be driven from his last entrenchment on earth, and the whole footstool of God, in all its length and breadth, have been reclaimed to his Son for an inheritance and a possession. Powerful and conclusive is the argument of Paul: "how shall the heathen believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?" The clamour of those therefore in our land, who cry, "down with *all* ministers," is the voice of infidelity, and its real meaning is, down with all religion. Yet history teaches us, that, as there was a Judas among the twelve, so some of the Iscariot band, have in all ages, thrust

themselves into the ministry, and that, at some periods, the ministerial body in general, sunk with the surrounding population into a state of deplorable degeneracy. That men of this character, whom the Saviour styles wolves in sheep's clothing, would be actuated by the same principles in this office, which governed them out of it; that their influence could not serve as the channel for those blessings, which God designed, through them, to pour out upon the world, is obvious. Of this we have living examples before our eyes in the degraded state of Italy, Spain and other Catholic countries, once distinguished above others for literature and science, or for commercial enterprize and activity; but whose poor, oppressed inhabitants are now shut out from the intellectual and moral light, which has beamed upon the Protestant world, which is teaching subjects to feel, that they have civil and religious rights which even their rulers may not invade: and forcing home upon the minds of kings and emperors, the unwelcome truth, that a decent regard for these rights, is essential to the stability of the thrones on which they repose. And although we believe the present generation of ministers in our happy land, taken as a whole, to be as pure and sincere, as the same number of ministers ever was since the days of the apostles; yet as christians and as patriots, it is our duty to guard against the possibility of evil. This is the more proper on the present occasion, as sabbath-schools have been charged with a tendency to produce these very evils!

When we inquire, how did a ministry, which had become corrupt, fail to lose its influence over the community, we find, that, either ignorance and superstition among the people, or an unholy union of civil and ecclesiastical power

was their chief support. That a corrupt ministry could, independently of these auxiliaries, exert but little influence over an enlightened, virtuous people, is almost a self-evident truth. But the experiment could never be made. Such is the reciprocal influence, which the clergy and laity exert upon one another, that within certain limits, their characters run parallel to each other; and even when changing for better or worse, they will as a whole, never be found occupying contrary extremes. Piety among the members of the church, tends to preserve and elevate the piety of their minister. Their prayers strengthen him, their admonitions stimulate him, their high expectations prevent his standard of duty from sinking low. Amid a wordly people, the whole current of influence is reversed. In his intercourse with them, the servant of God finds nothing to warm his heart. The desire of pleasing them, tempts him to relax a little the requisitions of the gospel, and the fear of losing his subsistence, sometimes prevents him from preaching against fashionable vices. The students taken from such a lukewarm people to fill the future ranks of the ministry, will generally be very different from those, brought forth and matured amid the fire and heat of religious revivals. Yet, without the two causes above specified, a ministry by becoming corrupt would necessarily lose its influence.

It was when ignorance prevailed among the people, and was extolled as the mother of devotion, when the bible was concealed beneath the impenetrable veil of an unknown tongue, and men could not imitate the Berean example of searching the Scriptures to see whether these things were so, that a corrupt priesthood made them believe the greatest ab-

surditities. Did an intelligent nation, enlightened by the rays of bible truth, ever believe that the priest could forgive sins? or tolerate the abominable traffic in papal indulgences? or believe, that a tooth, or a bone of a martyr, or a chip of his coffin, could heal diseases? It was the general ignorance and superstition of the people, which enabled Peter, the hermit, together with the popes and cardinals, to engage a large part of Europe in the memorable crusades. It was owing to the ignorance and superstition of the people, that the papal hierarchy grew to its enormous dimensions; that the pope became the Juggernaut of Christendom, before whose bloody car the monarchs of Europe reverently bowed and did homage! On the other hand, the most powerful engine ever arrayed against papacy, and that by which the glorious Reformation was chiefly effected, and its doctrines perpetuated, was the general diffusion of bible truth, by the translation of the sacred volume into the vernacular tongues of Europe, & the general inculcation of its doctrines on the old and the young. Of all this, his holiness is well aware. Else why evince such sensibility at the stroke of the spear? Why hurl, in the nineteenth century, the thunders of the Vatican at the Bible societies of Europe? Why keep in constant operation the infernal inquisition, by which all free inquiry is suppressed, and the human mind kept bound in chains of ignorance and superstition? Why, in our own country, do his Jesuitic emissaries, search up the copies of the book of God, distributed among Catholics by Bible societies, as though they were charged with latent poison?

Do not these symptoms of the disease clearly point out the remedy? In our own happy land, we have, at present,

nothing to fear from the civil authorities. Should the ministry become corrupt, and yet retain any influence over the minds of the people, it must be through popular ignorance and superstition. Against these, therefore, the efforts of the christian and the patriot ought to be directed. But how can we better dispel ignorance among the future citizens of our land, than by the general introduction of sabbath-schools, into which all of every rank and condition are admitted, and especially the poor, whose want of means would otherwise condemn them to ignorance for life? How can we better guard them against the gloomy reign of superstition, than by sabbath-schools, in which they are early made acquainted with the bible, the unadulterated fountain of truth. Thus they become qualified in afterlife to judge, whether the doctrines taught by their ministers are correct. Thus they learn to see that their salvation depends, not on the absolution of the priest or the favour of a minister, but on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. They learn that the power assigned by the Saviour to the ministers of his gospel, is altogether a moral influence; and are able to detect the very first attempts to transcend those bounds, should any be made. They learn from the sacred volume, what are the specific duties prescribed to ministers, and can decide how long their pastor deserves their confidence and support, and when he should be abandoned as unfaithful. We rightly judge, that the best method of defending our liberties against the encroachment and rapacity of civil rulers, is to have our Constitution and the laws defining their powers generally circulated, and our citizens taught to read them. Thus they learn what these officers may, and what they may not require of

them. But is it not equally evident, that our best defence against any future corruption of the ministerial body, must be sought in the same remedy? in the effort to teach all the future citizens of our land to read that holy volume, in which the duties of ministers are clearly defined, in which they are declared to be as fallible as other men, and are warned against unfaithfulness by all the joys of heaven and all the terrors of hell?

Yet still, if sabbath-schools were generally introduced, and the whole rising generation taught the doctrines of the bible, would there not, as has been alleged by the enemy, be some danger of thus producing the very event, before specified as the second cause of an improper influence of the clergy, namely a union of church and state? As well might we ask: would not our liberties be endangered, if, in pursuance of Judge Livingston's suggestion, the principles of our Constitution and laws were digested into the form of a school-book, and all the rising generation made to read it? In both cases the reply would evidently be: "certainly not, unless the books themselves contain something, which favours such an event." That the sacred volume would not, that it could not sanction a measure, which has produced the greater part, of all the real calamities of the church of Christ, and has been the greatest impediment to her spiritual prosperity which she has ever had to encounter, might naturally be expected. Accordingly, no passage can be found, in which the Saviour, or his apostles, exhort either the Roman governors or the Jewish Sanhedrim, to establish his religion by law; or to take upon themselves as civil officers, the management of any of the affairs of his church. But he does tell us expressly,

that his kingdom is not of this world; that it has no connexion with the dominion of Cæsar, that his disciples could give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, whilst, at the same time, they yielded to God the things that are God's. For every duty prescribed to the church, there is also some person *in the church* specified to perform it. The Saviour appointed the apostles and their successors, in connexion with the members of the church, to perform *every act of government and discipline*, requisite for her progressive extension, until the end of the world. How absurd the idea, that kings and other rulers, who succeed to office without any reference to ecclesiastical qualifications, should be the source of any, much less, of all ecclesiastical authority! Ministers of the gospel in such circumstances, are not the immediate servants of Christ, but of the civil magistrate! Nor can they say, *one* is our Master, for they have "lords many." It is therefore evident from Scripture, that when civil rulers undertake to decide, as in Europe they often do, who shall and who shall not be admitted into the sacred office, what qualifications must be required of candidates for ordination, what doctrines shall be believed throughout the land and what discipline be practised, or rather, that no discipline at all shall be observed; they usurp an authority, which the Saviour never confided to them, and for which they must answer at his bar. Certainly, then, we need entertain no apprehension, that the instruction of children in the doctrines of this Bible, will cherish predilections hostile to our liberties.

But how has it happened, that this union has continued to subsist for so many ages, and in Europe prevails at the present day? It ought to be remembered that this unholy alli-

ance was first brought into existence, not by the suffrages of a free people, nor by a decree of Synods or Councils, but by the unlimited power of an individual emperor. And the fact, that Constantine, even after he had issued edicts in favour of Christians, made liberal donations to be expended on Pagan temples, celebrated the apotheosis of his father, and appeared in public decorated with the insignia of Jupiter, Mars, Hercules and Apollo ; clearly proves that he was not, at least in the earlier part of his life, actuated by sincere attachment to our holy religion. But he saw that Christians were better subjects than Pagans, that former emperors had failed to exterminate them, even by the most inhuman persecutions; and, as Manso, his recent German biographer shows, he found that Christians, although not yet a majority in the empire, had nevertheless become too numerous to be disregarded, and therefore his sagacity as a statesman prompted him first to tolerate them, and afterwards to incorporate their religion with the civil fabric of his empire. The same motives seem more or less to have actuated Theodosius, the first, and the second, Theodoric and Justinian, who confirmed this union by additional enactments. They received it as an established maxim, that no government can long subsist, unless the body of the people have some sense of moral obligation; they judged rightly too, that the Christian religion is better calculated to make faithful subjects than Paganism; but they erred in imagining, that Christianity could not support herself, nor exert her salutary influence on the civil institutions of a nation, unless incorporated with the state. This policy, sustained by the clergy, who entertained the same erroneous opinion, and were doubtless sometimes prompted by a corrupt self-interest, has maintained this union to the present day. This opin-

ion seems also to have prevailed among the populace of Europe. Hence when the question was agitated, as has repeatedly been the case, which of several sects should be established by law; for obvious reasons, each denomination struggled hard for its own elevation. But until the rise of our own happy republic, which was reared by God to teach the world such important lessons of civil and ecclesiastical jurisprudence; the mass of a nation had never been called on to decide, whether they would tax themselves by law for the support of some particular form of Christianity, or tolerate all religions, leaving each to depend on the voluntary support of its friends. The fact, that in the first three centuries our holy religion not only survived amid the fires of persecution, lighted up by successive Roman emperors, but extended itself over a large part of the then known world, ought to have taught them the fallacy of that opinion. But its unprecedented prosperity in our own land under the influence of mere toleration, has placed the point beyond all doubt: and we trust there is not a single christian among us, who would be willing to see the kingdom of the Redeemer in this country, cursed by such a union; nor a single citizen, who would willingly step forward and place his neck under the yoke. As such a union would tend to exalt one sect to the detriment of the others; all others would be prompted to oppose it; and would, without the aid of the millions belonging to no denomination, far outnumber the aspiring sect. And as all laws emanate from the people themselves, acting through their representatives, it appears altogether incredible, that the majority of our citizens should ever be willing to tax themselves by law, for the support of any denomination of ministers whatever. We see, therefore, that this dreaded

evil sprung from state policy, and not from the instruction either of the old or young in the precepts of the bible, which teaches a contrary doctrine; and the idea, that sabbath schools tend to promote it, is manifestly the product either of ignorance, or hostility to true religion. In the mouth of a pretended christian such an apprehension amounts to this position: a little Christianity is useful, but much of it will ruin the nation. And, can this in truth be termed any thing else than infidelity?

Finally, sabbath-schools exert a most salutary influence on the prosperity of the church. This is indeed a copious aspect of the subject, affording matter enough not only for a sermon, but a volume; yet, having deemed it expedient on this occasion to dwell upon others, we can but cast a glance at this.

Sabbath-schools, especially upon the associated plan so extensively prevalent in our land, tend to *banish* that *bigotry and sectarianism* which have crept into the Christian church, which strut about in fictitious garbs; and beneath the sacred mantle of religious zeal, give vent to the most unhallowed feelings of malevolence and ambition; which out of pretended love to his soul, will steal a fellow-christian from a sister church, or unsuccessful in this, for some trifling diversity of opinion, in the name of God, consign his soul to hell! How different this from the spirit of primitive Christianity, when all who loved the Lord Jesus, in any one place, lived in unity together, "breaking bread from house to house and eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart!" How great a stumblingblock to infidels and worldly minded men! how great an impediment to the progress of the gospel in villages and sparsely populated sections of our country, in which, united, christians might support the gospel; but,

cut up into jealous and discordant sects, and hating one another as though each believed a different Christ, all must remain destitute of the stated means of grace ? But sabbath-schools, by bringing together teachers of different denominations, and associating them in the same labour of love, and showing them that they all believe in the same gospel, & are travelling to the same heaven, lead them to acknowledge each other as brethren in reality, and to forget the minor differences by which they are distinguished; tend to rear a generation of christians, who have been deeply imbued with the true spirit and cardinal doctrines of the gospel, rather than with sectarian peculiarities ; who have been taught to regard *the Church of Christ* as the great object of the believer's wishes and prayers, rather than the Lutheran, the Presbyterian, the Episcopal, or any other individual part of that church; and such christians are needed for the dawn of the Millennium !

Again, they increase the *piety of churches* as well as augment the *number of their members*. We might here show you, that sabbath-school teachers are spiritual pioneers, that they clear away the difficulties, which often render the preached word of none effect; prevent children from profaning the Lord's day; prepare both children and adults to hear with more benefit the preached word, and thus tend to increase the number of those who are added to the kingdom of heaven. We might dwell on the extensive field for lay-agency, which is opened by them in every congregation; in which the young convert, whose heart is burning with the zeal of his first love, may devote all his energies to God, in recommending to all around him the rock of his salvation. We might show, how the aged believer, and how deacons and elders can here aid their pastor in building up the church ;

we might dwell upon the importance of sabbath-schools as nurseries for future ministers and future missionaries of the cross, but for all this we have not time. Enough, more than enough, we trust has been said to convince you all, that in whatever light we view this noble institution, it seems fraught with blessings, and merits your warmest support.

How can we, *as patriots*, neglect an institution, having so direct a tendency to exalt this happy land? which reduces our catalogue of thieves and robbers and murderers? which makes good citizens of those who would otherwise grow up in ignorance and vice; which preserves the purity and increases the stability of our political institutions, and tends to shield us against future corruption in church and state? Nay, by thus promoting righteousness we may not only exalt our own country; but also exert a happy influence on the other nations of the earth. The generous politician may adopt the christian's maxim: "the field is the world." How important an influence on the general principles of international intercourse, has not the liberal policy of these United States already exerted? How much more could be effected by the united and persevering influence of several nations, in elevating the lower ranks of society, in putting an entire stop to the foul traffic in human flesh, and in gradually banishing from the family of civilized man, that mother of evils, war!

How could we, *as christians*, neglect an institution which God has so abundantly blessed, to the conversion of souls, to the extension of his kingdom? No, my hearers, let us go on in the good work, let us redouble our efforts, and may that blessed Redeemer, who commanded little children to be brought unto him, crown our efforts with abundant success, and to his gracious name be the glory! Amen.

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

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BY

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